

No defensive barrier from Wycombe

This afternoon we welcome enterprising Wycombe Wanderers. They come to Ninian Park, according to manager Brian Lee, "to play a Cup tie that will bring skill and enjoyment." So far this season the Rothmans Isthmian League champions have played five games to reach the second round proper of the F.A. Cup.

In a qualifying round match against a division two Isthmian League club, Croydon, they drew 2-2 away and won the replay 5-2; then came three games against Southern League rivals Bedford Town with a 0-0 home game, a 2-2 away game and then a 2-1 home victory when Welsh-born schoolmaster Dylan Evans scored the winning goal.

Despite that battle to reach Ninian Park today, Lee says that there is "no chance" that Wanderers come looking for a draw to give themselves a home replay on their famous sloping pitch. "That is the way to empty the terraces. Football is an attacking game to be played with skill.

"If you don't attack, show your skill and enjoy yourselves, then you are not playing fairly." This is the philosophy of the forthright man who crossed swords with experts as famous as Jack Charlton during Wanderers exciting Cup run last season.

In the first round, they beat Southern League club Cheltenham 3-1; in the second they started to catch the imagination of the football world as they went to Bournemouth and beat the then Third Division club 2-1 after being a goal down at half time. Next came the famous tie against Charlton's First Division Middlesbrough.

FIGHTING QUALITY

Wycombe had the home draw and Middlesbrough defended sternly to earn a 0-0 scoreline. The Isthmian side then made the long journey to the North East and demonstrated their quality and spirit to the nation by losing 0-1 as Dave Armstrong found the net in the second half to seal a controversial tie.

The views of Lee, director at the Bispham Abbey National Sports Centre, became big news. He broadcast his strong feelings about the worth of attacking football, held his ground eloquently under fire and emerged as a five star personality and one of football's progressive thinkers.

"Professionalism is an attitude of mind," he says. "We don't view the players of Cardiff City as any more professional than ourselves. The definition that professionalism simply means a full time job in the game is the wrong one. It is all in approach and attitude.

"It doesn't matter that our players are schoolmasters, office workers, carpenters, labourers or whatever. Their attitude to the game is totally professional — indeed, they enjoy evening training as much as most players enjoy games. The main difference between us is that we do not have enough time for football and the League professionals have too much!"

Lee says that there is "no comparison" between the form of last season's side that gripped the imagination of football followers everywhere and this season's record. Wycombe, Isthmian champions for four of the last five seasons, are currently third in the table behind Enfield and Hendon.

MOVES TO RIVALS

This is significant because these two clubs have claimed three of the four departing heroes from last season's successful Cup team. Wales amateur international Alan Phillips and co-defender Gary Hand are with Hendon, England amateur international Keith Searle has moved to Enfield — and striker Steve Perrin turned professional with Crystal Palace.

Replacements have been left back Ray Eaton, centre half John Delaney, forwards Geoff Anthony and Evans. "It has been difficult for us this season," admits Lee. "Once you have won something, every other side wants that much more to beat you. Every side makes it hard for us."

Nevertheless, Wycombe have had their moments this winter. They have beaten both Enfield and Hendon at home and gained some fine away victories, including two points from a trip to Tooting which manager Lee rated as the best away display so far.

Crowds are down at the Loakes Park ground — but that's nothing that another Cup run wouldn't put right. "To take Cardiff back to our ground, or even to win through into the third round once again would be tremendous," says Lee. "And, after all, excitement and drama are what the Cup is all about."